WRITTEN QUESTION E-0323/01
by Bart Staes (Verts/ALE) to the Commission

(13 February 2001)

Subject: The European Year of Languages and the planned closure of the Frisian language and literature department at the Arts Faculty of the University of Amsterdam

The Union has officially declared 2001 the European Year of Languages (European Parliament and Council Decision 1934/2000/EC (1)). For 12 months, the spotlight will be on Europe's linguistic diversity. Languages are an important part of Europe's cultural heritage and are vital to the future of Europe (see European Year of Languages on: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/actions/year2001.html).

Attention will be devoted to all European languages, including so-called 'regional' languages, the languages of minorities and sign languages. The principal message of the advertising campaign for the year, 'Learning languages opens doors, and everyone can do it: it is never too late or too early', is neutral and not geared to any particular language or group of languages.

On 30 October 1987 the European Parliament adopted the Kuijpers resolution on promoting minority languages in education, the media and communication with the authorities. This represented a major step forward in the recognition accorded to the less widely used languages, such as Frisian.

The University of Amsterdam's plan to close its Frisian language and literature department is diametrically opposed to the objectives of the European Year of Languages and the Kuijpers resolution. The University of Amsterdam is the only institution of university level in the densely populated West Holland conurbation where Frisian language and literature is taught. There have been numerous protests about the university authorities' proposal for this cut.

Does the Commission consider that the University of Amsterdam's plan to close down its 'doctoraal' course in Frisian language and literature is diametrically opposed to the broad, ambitious objectives of the European Year of Languages and the Kuijpers resolution?

(a) If so, what will the Commission do to:

1. draw the University of Amsterdam's attention to the importance of its 'doctoraal' course in Frisian language and literature for the objectives of the Year of Languages?
2. urge the University of Amsterdam to continue this 'doctoraal' course without in any way diminishing it?
3. draw the Netherlands Government's attention to the importance of the University of Amsterdam's 'doctoraal' course in Frisian language and literature for the objectives of the Year of Languages?
4. urge the Netherlands Government to continue the University of Amsterdam's 'doctoraal' course in Frisian language and literature without in any way diminishing it?

(b) If not, how can the Commission reconcile the planned closing down of the University of Amsterdam's 'doctoraal' course in Frisian language and literature with the broad, ambitious objectives of the European Year of Languages?


Answer given by Mrs Reding on behalf of the Commission

(5 April 2001)

The Commission would refer the Honourable Member to its written reply to Oral Question H-0254/01 put by Mr Staes during question time at Parliament's April 2001 part-session (2).

(2) Answer of 3.4.2001.